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July 7, 2019

State Senate
Alaska State Capitol
120 4th Street Rm 3
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

House of Representatives
Alaska State Capitol
120 4th Street Rm 3
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Dear Members of the Alaska Legislature,

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) is recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE) and accredits institutions of higher education in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington by applying evidence-informed standards and processes to support continuous improvements and promote student achievement and success. The 161 voluntary members of NWCCU represent a diverse range of institutions, including the public institutions of higher learning in Alaska.

Students, the public, state regulatory agencies, such as the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, other higher education institutions, and employers recognize that accredited institutions offer universally accepted degrees and programs. Students at only accredited institutions are eligible for federal funding, i.e., Title IV federal financial aid and federally sponsored grant programs.

The proposed 41-percent reduction in state funding to the public institutions of higher learning in Alaska poses a material and significant risk to the quality of education provided to the students within those institutions. If student success and achievement are demonstrably affected, it could potentially jeopardize the accreditation status of these institutions.

As you are well aware, University of Alaska-Fairbanks, University of Alaska-Anchorage, and University of Alaska-Southeast have been subjected to a series of reductions in funding for most of the last decade. During that period, the administrators, faculty, and staff of the University of Alaska system have taken steps to ensure the continued successful delivery of programs through consolidation, the use of online technology, the sharing of resources, and partnerships within and without the system of institutions. They have partnered with the private sector to identify and deliver key programs, including healthcare and education programs, critical for native people and all citizens who aspire to better lives. All of these efforts have ensured the continued accreditation of these institutions. In addition to workforce development, these institutions have been critical as innovation and economic engines for the entire state of Alaska.

I'd like to highlight, as well, that during NWCCU's most recent evaluation visits to the University of Alaska campuses, the evaluation teams reported that faculty, staff, and administrators were developing innovative models and techniques to engage students in the

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geographically expansive and diverse service-area of the state, contributing to better and improved student outcomes, including retention and graduation rates. We have observed a passionate, community-focused set of institutions committed to the success of all Alaskans.

I write today to share my concern over the proposed reduction in funding, and urge you and your colleagues to ensure the University of Alaska campuses are provided adequate funding to continue the delivery of high quality public education to the citizens of Alaska. Failure to properly fund these institutions could have disastrous effects, including the potential loss of accreditation, that could be felt for generations. I urge you to please reconsider this year's drastic budget reductions being proposed.

I know you'll have myriad interests to consider under the budget constraints, but I remain hopeful that you will protect the interests of the students who attend the University of Alaska institutions, because they're critically important to the future of Alaska.

Thanks for your consideration.

Please do contact me if you need additional information in this regard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sonny Ramaswamy".

Sonny Ramaswamy
President